

## Traffic Safety News and Facts for Employers June 19, 2006

### **NETS Feature:**

#### **Minimum Drinking Age Puts Parents in Control**

Commentary:

By Robert Voas, Ph.D.

While alcohol remains the No. 1 health risk to young people, research on youth drinking and driving has shown some positive news in the last two decades. Between 1982 and 1998, the population-weighted rate of drinking drivers younger than 21 in fatal crashes declined by an amazing 59 percent. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration gives most of the credit to the minimum legal drinking age law enacted by Congress in 1984. The law saves more than 900 lives a year.

...More [http://www.trafficsafety.org/newsletter/drinking\\_061506feat.asp](http://www.trafficsafety.org/newsletter/drinking_061506feat.asp)

### **Latest Traffic Safety News**

#### **Polk Study Finds Consumers Admit Cell Phones Cause Careless Driving**

According to a public opinion poll by the Polk Center for Automotive Studies, despite being aware of the dangers of holding a cell phone while driving, consumers continue to put themselves and other drivers at risk. More than half (51 percent) of drivers surveyed said they observe careless driving due to mobile phone use on a daily basis, and 52 percent agree that their own driving suffers while on the phone. The vast majority of respondents (92 percent) agree that talking on the phone while driving increases the risk of accidents. For further information,

[http://usa.polk.com/News/LatestNews/2006\\_0517\\_phones.htm](http://usa.polk.com/News/LatestNews/2006_0517_phones.htm)

#### **Disorder Results In Road Rage**

A new national survey suggests that between 5.4 percent and 7.3 percent of U.S. adults qualify for a diagnosis of intermittent explosive disorder at some time during their lives (typically begins during adolescence and lasts for at least a decade, with an average of 43 episodes per person), according to a team led by sociologist Ronald C. Kessler of Harvard Medical School in Boston. The mental disorder that encompasses a wide range of recurring, hostile outbursts, including domestic violence and road rage, characterizes considerably more people than previous data had indicated. The finding were, published in the June Archives of General Psychiatry.

#### **IIHS Urges Automakers To Step Up Installation Of ESC**

A report released early this week by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) urges automakers to step up installation of electronic stability control (ESC), which uses brakes and engine power to keep cars from veering off course. New research suggests stability-control systems would save about 10,000 lives a year if they were on all vehicles, making the technology's life-saving potential second only to seat belts. Stability control is typically standard equipment only on SUVs, which have a greater risk of rollover, and luxury cars. The institute estimates that if all vehicles had stability control, the risk of fatal single-vehicle crashes would be reduced by 56% and the overall risk of single-vehicle crashes would be cut by 40%.

### **Study Finds Complicated Controls In Some Luxury Cars Annoying (And Distracting)**

"Upscale cars may be faster, safer, and more reliable these days, but they're also more annoying," according to the latest Initial Quality Study from J.D. Power & Associates Inc. Drivers of BMWs must use the complex, cumbersome iDrive system, the Windows-like interface, to play a CD or cool down the interior. Toggling from the stereo screen to the climate menu to get the AC running requires a series of twists and clicks of the controls, not to mention keeping at least one eye on the screen. Mostly it's the fancy German brands -- Mercedes (DCX), BMW, Audi -- getting dinged for their overwrought gizmos, poor ergonomics, and other design missteps. "Some auto makers are finding ways to give you [everyday] technology and make it more complicated," says Joe Ivers, J.D. Power's quality and customer satisfaction chief.

### **New Seat Belt Designs Easier To Use**

Some automakers have new belt designs for front-seat occupants with seat belts built directly into the seats instead of attaching to the sides or ceilings of vehicles. These belts are more convenient to use and can detect pressure on brakes and automatically tighten before a crash occurs. Also in the design phase are rear-seat-belt warning systems that will be helpful to parents with children.

### **Counterfeit Parts Are A Safety Risk For Trucks**

Sales of counterfeit and knock-off parts for use on heavy-duty trucks are posing safety risks to fleets according to a recent article in Light and Medium Truck. Brake parts rank as one of the top five most heavily counterfeited truck parts, with brake shoes and drums most likely to be copied. These knock-off brake parts compromise truck safety because they can cause increased wear to other components, and lead to premature part failure and increased stopping distance. A variance in any one component can affect the entire braking system and can lead to serious safety problems. The imitations are easier to make these days because of the proliferation of detailed information on web sites like photos and designs that can be downloaded. For further information, <http://www.ttnews.com/lmt/June06/imitation.asp>

### **Stretch Limousines Could 'Stretch' Safety Limits**

While custom shops can 'stretch' any SUV, the question is, how would that vehicle perform in a crash? Only Cadillac and Ford have specific guidelines on how to 'stretch' their vehicles. Many other popular vehicles are converted such as Hummers, but their warranties are then void. Brakes and the suspension may not be able to handle the additional weight. For further information, <http://www.lctmag.com>

### **Edmunds Top 10 Choices For Safety Technologies**

Edmunds has listed their top 10 choices for automotive safety technologies with a list of the automakers offering them and their estimated costs: tire-pressure monitoring, adaptive cruise control/collision mitigation, blind-spot detection/side assist/collision warning, lane-departure warning/wake-you-up safety, rollover prevention/mitigation, occupant-sensitive/dual-stage airbags, emergency brake assist/collision mitigation, adaptive headlights and/or night-vision assist, rearview camera, and emergency response. For further information, <http://www.edmunds.com/reviews/list/top10/114984/article.html>

### **Speed Limit Raised On Some Rural Texas Highways**

Earlier this month, the Texas legislature unanimously voted to raise the speed limits on stretches of two west Texas highways (Interstates 10 and 20) from 75 mpg to 80 mph despite objections by many national highway safety organizations. This involves about 520 miles of roadway, less than 1 percent of Texas' 79,000 miles of roadway that are mostly 4-lane, straight and well-maintained with wide shoulders and little traffic. The new limit does not apply to large trucks, and the maximum nighttime

speed limit for all drivers is still 65 mph. The legislation sponsor, Pete Gallego, says the new limit merely legalizes current behavior.

### **Navigating By Cell Phone Soon**

Research indicates that cellular phone companies and automotive system suppliers are positioned to present a serious competitive response to the well-branded navigation products from TomTom, Garmin, Magellan.

### **Lawrence KS Cell Phone Ban Would Be Nation's Strictest**

A proposed Lawrence, KS cell phone ordinance would ban the use of both hand-held cell phones and hands-free cell phone devices by motorists, according to the Lawrence Journal-World, which would be a first in the United States. Other bans generally prohibit only hand-held devices, with some banning hands-free devices for certain types of motorists, such as teenagers or school bus drivers. The one exception to the ban would allow motorists to use a cell phone to make an emergency call to police, fire, or other agencies. The proposed ordinance lists a maximum fine of \$100 for violating the ban, but lists no minimum fine. In addition to the cell phone ban, traffic safety commissioners also will consider an ordinance that would double the fine for inattentive driving (from \$60 to \$120) for any motorist involved in a crash while using a cell phone.

### **News from the USDOT**

#### **Traffic Crashes Claim Disproportionate Number Of Lives Among Minorities**

A recent NHTSA study found that motor vehicle crashes account for a disproportionate number of deaths among minorities, particularly among Native Americans and Hispanics. Only drivers of Asian/Pacific descent had better driving records than the general population. The higher minority death rates are spurring government outreach efforts to reduce the disparity. Experts say that cultural differences and lack of training may account for the disparity. For further information, <http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/pdf/nrd-30/NCSA/Rpts/2006/809956.pdf>

### **Work-Life**

#### **Toyota Launches Teen-Parent Safe Driving Program**

One of the most important events in a teenager's life is obtaining a driver's license. But while young drivers account for just 6.3 percent of licensed drivers, they account for 13.6 percent of all fatal crashes. In an effort to improve those odds, Toyota announced a new national program to promote safe driving among teens called Toyota Driving Expectations. This is a four hour program consisting of multiple driving courses and classroom instruction for teens and their parents. For further information, <http://www.toyotadrivingexpectations.com/>

### **International Traffic Safety News**

#### **One In Six Brits Under Influence Of Drink At Work**

According to the 'Alcohol in the Workplace' survey of 1,500 full time UK employees commissioned by Royal and SunAlliance, one in six employees in Britain has been under the influence of alcohol at work in the last six months. According to the Health & Safety Executive, between 8 to 14 million working days in the UK are lost annually due to alcohol-related absenteeism. Some 91 percent of the companies surveyed did have an alcohol policy in place, however, according to the report, there is a deep-rooted culture of people drinking during working hours in the UK and tackling the issue will require more than the measures that employers can put in place. For further information,

[http://www.lse.co.uk/ShowStory.asp?story=IG3025605A&news\\_headline=one in six brits under influence of drink at work](http://www.lse.co.uk/ShowStory.asp?story=IG3025605A&news_headline=one_in_six_brits_under_influence_of_drink_at_work)

### **UK Company Drivers Prefer Fleet Managers To HR Dept**

FleetNewsNet reports that thousands of UK company car drivers have given their unanimous backing to retaining the role of fleet manager in a survey by the vehicle management company, Total Motion, which found standards dropped when Human Resource Departments took over the fleet. In its Vehicle Monitor survey of 2,018 company car and authorized drivers, 84% of drivers rated the service and support they received from their fleet manager at eight out of 10 or above. However, when the HR department ran the fleet, only 21% of drivers rated the service and support at eight or above. Total Motion managing director, Simon Hill believes that when the job of fleet management is taken on by HR, it becomes just one of many administrative tasks. He said: 'HR departments haven't got the time or the motivation to be proactive, to keep up with the changing fleet market and to communicate with their drivers.

### **'Smart' Highways To Ease Traffic Congestion in India**

What if the roads beneath our vehicles were able to sense traffic congestion and help regulate the traffic signals or electronic toll collection allowing vehicles to drive through tollgates at traffic speed, reducing congestion at toll plazas and automating toll collection? Sounds futuristic but an intelligent transportation system (ITS) that utilizes infrared technology along with advanced telematic solutions, driving on the upcoming toll-highways in India will become easier. The system uses sensors and live cameras, and when necessary, variable message boards (VMS), highway advisory radio (HAR) and other systems.

### **Driving Policy Protected Fleet Following Fatal Crash**

A clear driving policy ensured that a fleet avoided prosecution after one of its drivers was involved in a fatal crash. Bill Pownall, a motor risk manager for Norwich Union, speaking at a Fleet News risk management conference, explained how an employer's clear guidelines about mobile phone use ensured the company was absolved of responsibility. "Police were able to prove he was on his mobile phone," said Pownall. "But when his employer was able to produce a drivers' handbook and demonstrate that induction, training, policies and procedures were subject to reviews and updates, the court decided the company had done everything that was reasonably practical to control the risk." Only the driver was prosecuted. Employers must be able to provide evidence that the policies are communicated, read, understood and regularly reviewed.

### **Newfoundland And Labrador Government Launches "Idle Free Zone" Campaign**

The idle free zone campaign, launched last week, encourages motorists to turn off their vehicle while waiting in areas like drive-throughs. Idling a vehicle for 10 minutes a day uses an average of 100 litres of gas a year or every car and truck in the province releasing 240 kg (530 lbs) of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere annually. "It is estimated that more than 5,000 Canadians die prematurely each year because of air pollution, and thousands more become needlessly ill," says Health and Community Services minister Tom Osborne. For further information, <http://www.releases.gov.nl.ca/releases/2006/env/0605n06.htm>